

# PARIS CAVES "OUT-SHOW" THE STAGE DURING HUN RAID

When the Siren Signal Is Heard Fair France Flees in the Most Piquant of Lingerie and Fur-Trimmed Pyjamaettes — All Theatres Are Crowded Nightly in the Capital, Where Amusement Is Strenuously Sought After

(By George Rothwell Brown.)

Going to the theatre in Paris nowadays is one of the most expensive and unsatisfactory things a person can do. "never attended a 'show' while I was there that wasn't broken up along about 10 o'clock by an air raid. And I had to beat it, along with everybody else, and never got anything back at the box office, not only because giving anything back at the box office is contrary to impresario traditions the world over, but because by the time I reached the door there wasn't anybody there to give a rebate, or a rain check, or a bomb check, or whatever they would have called it, even if the management had been in a generous mood, which it never was.

But there are compensations in all things. The visitor in Paris cheated by the Gothas at the Folies-Bergere, is rather more likely than not to make up in the "cave," when he returns later on to his hotel, for what he was deprived of seeing among the merry-go-rounds of the stage.

What the French girls beat it to the "cave" in these nights in Paris wouldn't furnish a wardrobe for a canary bird, as Brother Billy Sunday would say. Trust those petite Parisiennes!

They have regular costumes for beating it to the "cave," just as they have for going shopping, or to the races, or to the matinee, or to the beach. And their reticements make up in chic and style what they lack in material. Fur-trimmed pyjamaettes and pink silk nightgowns are the vogue.

Naturally when a girl is bombed out of her bed along about an hour or so before midnight, she isn't going to

waste any time lacing up knee-length boots, or prying herself into a street gown with the assistance of a shoe horn. Nothing like that. She simply slips neatly and deftly into something appropriate to the occasion, something easy to put on in the dark, even when one is running along an unlighted hotel corridor, and the next instant she bursts like a vision from paradise, like a cherub angel, into the "cave," along with the rest of the feminine berserker similarly attired; and if you are fortunate enough to be there too you don't care whether the Folies-Bergere is closed on account of the Hun raid or not.

Mr. Ziegfeld's chorus has nothing on any of these girls. Indeed, they haven't much on themselves. They would make Maude Allan look all dressed up. It doesn't cost anything to beat it down into the "cave" when the Gothas arrive over Paris to leave a few steel visiting cards. That privilege goes with the various things one gets around a hotel for nothing, like the air, for example. After trying it once one understands why heavily whiskered gentlemen of undoubted courage rather prefer to seek safety in the hotel "cave" than to remain out in the Place de l'Opera where they could watch the bombs and the star shells, and the ghost-like aviators. In Paris, during a Gothas visit, there are more interesting things to watch. In fact I doubt if anywhere in the world there are any more interesting ones. I have heard learned experts say that the Parisienne "have them all faded," whatever that may mean, when it comes to good looks and clothes, and especially when it comes to good looks sans clothes. And that's the kind of clothes they wear in the "cave."

The "cave," pronounced "karve," is what we refer to as the cellar. It's where we keep coal and the French keep wine, so it will be seen that their system is better than ours, especially as they really do have the wine. And to quiet shell-racked nerves, what is simpler than to crack a few bottles? Nothing!

When one of these "karves" softly illuminated by flickering lights, comes filled with Parisiennes in con-

siderable fright and nothing much else, it forms, in some respects, a place of entertainment superior to the Folies-Bergere, or the promenade of the Olympia, or the Casino, even on a night when the marvellously magical Mistinguett thrills and delights an audience made up of officers in shabby uniforms whose names are on the rolls of every allied army in Europe.

"Tout le monde" is beating it to the cave these nights in Paris, but nevertheless Paris is in fine, good humor and laughs at the bombs and "Berthas" of outrageous fortune. The Huns get gloomy and pessimistic every time a British bomb drops in Cologne, but not so in Paris. A raid is a jest to be taken smilingly, cheerfully, almost joyously, and always bravely. The comedians on the stage sing about the Gothas, and the audience applauds as every scrap of fun and humor is squeezed from them.

It was one of those typical French farces, such as one often gets on Broadway, and produced after the first and third acts have been eliminated, the second expurgated by Mr. Comstock's successor, and the fourth rewritten by good reliable Sunday school superintendent, and which is then hailed by the critics, who swallow Ziegfeld and the Winter Garden without making a wry face, as entirely too bold and daring for taste, respectable old New York. The one I saw had not been passed by the Maryland Board of Censors. A good many things escaped me in my innocence, but I got an earful as it was, while the eye was constantly employed.

Expurgated, the plot was something like this: A lady has a rendezvous with her lover. The husband and wife meet, and the husband is just as busy keeping her from discovering that her husband is a friend of the husband in keeping his wife from finding out about his lady friend, and there is a terrible to-do, all in rapid-fire French, and presently the stage is just cluttered up with people of both sexes in their nightgowns, and the covers of the pretty brass bed in one corner have been turned down and it begins to look as though somebody was going to get shot, or something, when suddenly the back door (on the stage) opens and an excited gentleman advances in the footlights and delivers his system of a speech that sounds exactly like a huge section of a large unabridged French dictionary pouring over Niagara Falls.

My French is considerably shy, but my appreciation of art is 100 per cent. I know good acting when I see it, and this is good acting, from the heart. I don't know what the gentleman is saying, but it makes a hit with me. I know that whatever he is saying he is putting it across—putting it across in great shape. I applaud madly and look around to see what the audience thinks.

The audience is moved, strangely moved. With some every soldier-man present grabs his hat from under his seat and beats it. I stare in amazement, and think to myself that I never saw such a finale as any third act in my life. And then I become aware that the young lady next me is trying to climb over my lap. Evidently I am in the way.

I look wildly about, but I see nobody who looks as though he could talk English. This play is patronized only by those who understand the kind of French that sounds as if it was fired at you out of a machine gun. I say to myself, who by this time is in the act of climbing over my back, as I also reach for my hat, which appears to be the correct thing to do.

"Voulez-vous bien aller off my back, mademoiselle, si vous plait!" She didn't understand French very well. Maybe she was a Spaniard or something. Anyhow, she simply gave me a wild look as I straightened up, and struggling to get past me cried:

"Mon perle! Mon perle!"

I didn't know where her perle was, and I told her so, and I even offered to look for it on the floor, but she either couldn't or wouldn't understand me. By that time everybody else was at the door, so I started out, too. Whereupon mademoiselle grabbed me by the arm, and in the most feminine way imaginable, moaned, "Mon perle! Mon perle!"

I struggled to get away. Anybody would struggle to get away from a pretty Parisienne, and I am not different from anybody else. I struggled. Maybe I didn't struggle very hard. Anyhow, I finally found myself on the pitch-dark sidewalk, and there was mademoiselle, right on my arm, and every two jumps she cried out in a soft, tremulous little voice, "Mon perle! Mon perle!"

Then I tumbled. She was talking about her perle, and looking up into the sky I saw what was on her mind, and got my first sight of a Gothas raid. The aviators had come. The sky was full of bursting star shells and the barrage was up, a continual thunder of artillery fired in a great circle all around the city, as the gunners sought to bring down the winged Huns away there in the firmament.

A fire engine went shrieking through the streets, its siren wide open, and down the boulevard I could hear women's voices raised above the infernal din and the reassuring words of the men who were with them.

"Comment appliquez-vous cela?" I asked.

"L'alerte," said mademoiselle. "Mon perle!"

"Pas perle," I answered, and just then a bomb dropped down the street and put me in the Asnias Club.

"Mon perle!" cried mademoiselle with a shriek, and locked her hands around my arm. She had the most limited vocabulary of any woman I ever saw.

We joined the throng of people hurrying through the inky street, there wasn't a light anywhere, except where the shells were bursting far overhead. Every house was black, and I couldn't see my companion in that impenetrable darkness. But I could hear her, and the burden of her song was "Mon perle! Mon perle!"

"Par on iron-sous!" I asked.

"Ou puits-je prendre une taxi?" cried the lady. "Mon perle!"

"Pas taxi," I said, and I was right. There wasn't a taxi within half a mile.

though I called out the familiar Parisian signal of distress, "Taxi libre! Taxi libre!" No taxi! No we waited and presently we emerged into the Place de l'Opera, where it was a little lighter, and with a final shriek of "Mon perle!" mademoiselle beat it, with her skirts in both hands, her little silk-clad legs skimming the asphalt, and last I saw of her she was plunging headlong down the steps of the Metro, intent upon seeking safety from the shrapnel in the big station of the Underground.

The bomb we had heard fell a mile or so from my hotel, and finally getting a taxi, I went to the place. The Gothas had dropped his shell to one side of the street; where it had torn a great hole, bursting the gas mains, and setting fire to the adjacent buildings. I watched the Paris fire department at work, and mentally praised the men for their efficiency. They kept the fire from spreading, partly by their skill, but also partly because Paris is practically fireproof. If the Huns should bombard Harlem as they have bombed Paris they would reduce the upper end of Manhattan to ashes.

But not even the efficient Paris firemen could bring back to life the 30 people killed by that bomb, people murdered in their sleep by the apostles of kultur, women, and little children, torn to shreds and the fragments of their bodies scattered over the blood-drenched streets. It was a great night for barbarians.

As I walked back to my hotel through the dark boulevards, in which there was not the slightest sign of disorder or excitement, I found myself praying that Schwab would speed up his ships and that Baker would gather up his food, and that Baker would muster his armies, and Daniels his fleets, that America might play a mighty part, and very soon, in punishing the bloody murderers who kill children in their sleep. And this, thank God, they are doing. More power to all of them!

Just ahead of me a group of police were singing as they marched along, coming gayly from some cafe, and I could hear their splendid voices above the tramping of their feet. It was "Quand Madelon," the police's battle song which tells the story of the soldiers at the front, far away from the girls they love at home, wives or sweethearts, as the case may be, and who make love by proxy in the little wine shop, under the arbor leaves, to Madelon, who brings the wine to them. There is all the martial fire of the Marseillaise in that marching song, the greatest war song, I think, since Dixie.

The way these French soldiers sung out that last line, "Madelon! Madelon! Madelon!" was something grand. It is a wonderful song, and I found myself whistling it all the way back to my home.

A few nights later I was visiting a friend at his hotel, and was just saying good-bye in the lobby, about midnight, when the "alerte" was sounded.

The sound of the siren had hardly died away when a fairy-like creature about 15 years old, attired in a single feminine garment of singularly light and filmy material, burst into view, skinned lightly over the center table, displaying a pair of shapely ankles, and disappeared behind the cashier's desk.

"I was rubbing my eyes, when another vision darted into the lobby. She wore a pink silk what-you-may-call-it, and carried in her arms one shoe, a fur collar and a white poodle. She, too, disappeared behind the cashier's desk."

"It's another blundered raid," said my friend, who had lived in Paris a long time. "Let's go down in the karve."

"Quaint a moi," I replied in all the French I could muster. "Je de, sire voir des Gothas."

"Nonsense," he answered, "better go down in the karve. It's worth it." So I went, and it was.

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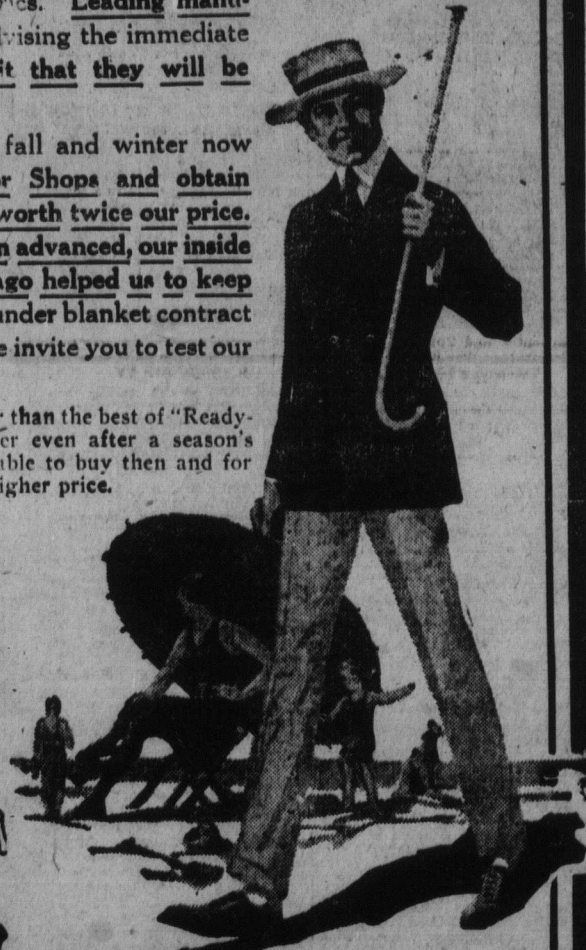
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